

POPULAR POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

ETHAN H. SHAGAN

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Northwestern University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Sabon 10/12pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Shagan, Ethan H., 1971–
Popular Politics and the English Reformation / Ethan H. Shagan
p. cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History)
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 80846 4 (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 52555 1 (paperback)

1. Great Britain – Politics and government – 1509–1547. 2. Christianity and
politics – Great Britain – History – 16th century. 3. Great Britain – Politics and
government – 1547–1553. 4. Public opinion – England – History – 16th century.
5. Populism – England – History – 16th century. 6. Reformation – England.

I. Title. II. Series

DA332 S48 2002 2002025672
942.05 – dc21

ISBN 0 521 80846 4 hardback
ISBN 0 521 52555 1 paperback

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*‘Schismatics be now plain heretics’:
debating the royal supremacy over
the Church of England*

The centrepiece and actualising principle of the English Reformation was not a theological doctrine, like Luther’s justification by faith alone, but an act of state: in November 1534, after years of extorting concessions from parliaments and clerical convocations, Henry VIII was endowed with the authority of ‘supreme head of the Church of England’. This was far more than a mere ratification of the annulment of the king’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon, the ostensible purpose for which he had challenged papal authority; it was a fundamental restructuring of power within the realm. For centuries, two governments, one royal and one ecclesiastical, had laid their overlapping claims to jurisdiction and sovereignty across the English polity. Two court systems had settled disputes, two tax systems had demanded revenues, and two rudimentary bureaucracies had maintained order. Now in a remarkable *coup d’état* the head of the Church government was overthrown, his legal authority eliminated, his political power outlawed, and his subordinates brought under the jurisdiction of the king of England.

One ironic result of this heavily politicised context is that, despite the significance of the royal supremacy for such diverse subjects as economic history, legal history and even the origins of the British Empire, one area in which its importance is not altogether clear is the study of religion. Earlier generations of scholars saw the overthrow of papal authority as promoting and enabling the concomitant growth of English Protestantism. Yet recently, historians have argued that ‘in 1535 it was not inevitable – it was not even likely – that the break with Rome would be followed by changes in religious belief and practice’. Likewise, scholars have claimed that the break with Rome was not part of a radical religious programme – the king ‘was always vigorously opposed to religious radicalism’ – but rather contributed to the self-conscious creation of a Henrician *via media* between Rome and Geneva. Most recently, it has even been suggested that English Catholics were largely unaffected by the royal supremacy since most favoured a humanist and irenic style of piety – ‘scriptural, reforming, and yet moderate’ – more than obedience to Rome. On these views, the royal supremacy was a

theologically indifferent policy, part of a 'political' rather than a spiritual Reformation.¹

These revisions presume a great deal about the nature of English religiosity. Besides claiming that Church governance could easily be separated from 'religious belief and practice' and that there was general agreement about what constituted 'religious radicalism', they also imply that certain prominent elements of the medieval Church – notably monasticism and many outward forms of ceremonial observance – were inessential to traditional religion. With Henry VIII's eradication of these elements thus glossed as spiritually indifferent and largely peripheral to popular concerns, revisionists can claim that most English people shared a broad, irenic consensus – they were all Christians, weren't they? – which remained relatively immune to successive ecclesio-political onslaughts so long as people went to church, said their prayers and loved their neighbours. This is how historians can argue that English religion was in all *essentials* the same in 1590 as it had been in 1530: only fanatics on both sides who wanted to shove England off the middle path claimed that innovations like the overthrow of the pope were significant enough to alter the essence of English religion. It also explains how English Catholics could dutifully support the royal supremacy, the dissolution of the monasteries, vernacular Bibles and even salvation through faith alone, until Trent and the Jesuits imposed their foreign, dogmatic, unforgiving faith upon the intrinsic moderation of the English Church.²

While ostensibly concerned with the English Catholic tradition, lying just below the surface of these arguments is an unwavering belief in something called 'Anglicanism', a notional, indigenous English faith that developed organically in the Middle Ages, navigated the dangerous waters of the Reformation, and emerged unsullied in the Restoration settlement of 1662. Anglicanism, in this view, was a religion above the fray of confessional dispute, instinctively conservative yet happy to yield on outward matters so long as certain core elements of Christian piety survived. It was the default religion of the English people, intrinsically Catholic but not necessarily papal, based on community and tradition rather than doctrine, which linked ostensibly Catholic parishioners in the 1520s with ostensibly Protestant parishioners in the 1580s. The *via media* between Rome and Geneva, in other words, was religion with the ideology left out. Needless to say, this pollyannish view is in considerable tension with Eamon Duffy's sobering portrait of traditional

¹ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 123; George Bernard, 'The Making of Religious Policy, 1533–1546: Henry VIII and the Search for the Middle Way', *HJ*, 41 (1998), 321–49, quotation at p. 325; Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000), quotation at p. 89.

² Haigh, *English Reformations*; Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism*.

religion being ripped apart at the seams in the middle decades of the sixteenth century. But, more importantly, this chapter will argue, the 'Anglican' ideal relies upon a dangerous teleology, isolating one strand of English religiosity, defining it as normative, and then projecting it backwards and forwards through time to illustrate the origins and development of English religious exceptionalism.

It cannot be denied that many English Catholics who supported Henry VIII's break with Rome saw themselves as the upholders of a conservative *via media*. Yet the fact that some people saw the royal supremacy as spiritually indifferent does not mean that the majority saw things that way, nor does it help us to understand how this view fitted into the larger debates of the time. The Act of Supremacy proclaimed that kings of England were supreme heads of the Church of England, yet for all the conciliarist and imperial bluster behind this claim, in practice no one knew in 1534 what a 'Church of England' was. Some contemporaries constructed narrow definitions which reduced the royal supremacy to a theologically indifferent claim to jurisdiction, while others defined the Church of England in highly radical terms as a grossly heretical assault on the one apostolic Church. These differences in interpretation were at the centre of the English Reformation, and they must be highlighted rather than elided. Rather than seeing the royal supremacy as either intrinsically radical or intrinsically indifferent, we need to appreciate that the very question of its spiritual significance was a crucial ground of contestation. It was along the fault lines created by this issue that the English Reformation at first largely operated, allowing people with a widely shared, traditionalist theology none the less to adopt vastly different and often violently antithetical responses to the government-sponsored Reformation of the 1530s.

This chapter will thus analyse Catholic reactions to the royal supremacy over the Church of England, focusing on evidence created before the summer of 1536, when the king first began to use his new authority for explicitly doctrinal experimentation.³ Rather than seeing the nation's acceptance of the royal supremacy as a by-product of innate English moderation, I want instead to present that acceptance, to the extent that it occurred, as the result of a *political process*. This process splintered the traditionalist Catholic population, encouraging the rapid development of the least ideological strand

³ For prior studies of responses to the royal supremacy, see e.g., G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972); Paul O'Grady, *Henry VIII and the Conforming Catholics* (Collegeville, Minn., 1990); Jean-Pierre Moreau, *Rome ou l'Angleterre? Les Reactions Politiques des Catholiques Anglais au Moment du Schisme, 1529-1553* (Paris, 1984); Glyn Redworth, *In Defence of the Church Catholic: The Life of Stephen Gardiner* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Anthony Shaw, 'Papal Loyalty in 1530s England', *Downside Review*, 117 (1999), 17-40; Ellen Macek, *The Loyal Opposition: Tudor Traditionalist Polemics, 1535-1558* (New York, 1996).

of medieval English Catholicism while dismantling or driving underground other, less ecumenical strands. The brand of Catholicism that survived and occasionally prospered in Henry VIII's England thus did so in active opposition to many other, equally viable modes of Catholic religiosity, in the process stripping English Catholicism of much that had made it a strong and vital faith to begin with.

I

Many English subjects would have been surprised to discover that the events of 1533–6 were inherently secular or political and did not constitute a spiritual Reformation. There were, of course, conciliarist arguments available within the late medieval Church that could be developed into strictly jurisdictional readings of the break with Rome, but the sheer volume of religiously motivated dissent against Henrician policies in these years belies the idea of a spiritually indifferent royal supremacy. To put the argument in its bluntest terms, Thomas More and John Fisher died protesting not a political dispute over sovereignty, but rather the nation's descent into heresy.

One barometer of the theological pressure generated by the royal supremacy was the large number of disaffected laymen who were prosecuted for accusing the king, either directly or obliquely, of heresy. In 1534, for instance, a Leicestershire servant called Henry Kylbre made the mistake of talking religion with the proprietor of the White Horse Inn in Cambridge, a hotbed of religious reform. When the proprietor told him, '[t]here is no pope but a bishop of Rome', Kylbre responded 'that he and whosoever held of his part were strong heretics'. When the proprietor countered that 'the king's grace held of his part', Kylbre carried his argument to its logical conclusion: 'then was both he an heretic and the king another'.⁴ Another layman, called George Taylor, was accused at the Buckinghamshire sessions in February 1535 of saying: 'The king is but a knave and liveth in adultery, and is an heretic and liveth not after the laws of God.' Taylor was so outraged by the king's heresy that he said if he had the king's crown in his possession, he 'would play at football with it'.⁵ Robert Augustyn said in the same year that if anyone wrote books against the pope 'otherwise than charity would require', he would 'take him and regard him no other ways than he would a schismatic, paynim, or Jew'. Augustyn also said that the chronicles of the realm were false when they accused the papacy of abusing King John, and that Rome had been so accused out of malice by 'false heretics'.⁶ In August 1535, the elderly Worcestershire husbandman Edmund Brocke expressed

⁴ PRO SP 1/84, fols. 111r–v [LP VII, 754].

⁵ PRO SP 1/90, fol. 184r [LP VIII, 278].

⁶ PRO SP 1/92, fol. 127r [LP VIII, 624].

similar ideas in a more rustic idiom; on a rainy day returning from market he told several of his neighbours: 'It is long of the king that this weather is so troublous or unstable, and I ween we shall never have better weather while the king reigneth, and therefore it maketh no matter if he were knocked or patted on the head.'⁷ In July 1535 at the parish church of Gisburn, Yorkshire, when the priest read Archbishop Lee's articles on the royal supremacy 'as was directed from the king's grace' one parishioner became so angry that he 'came violently and took [the] book first of the priest's hands and pulled it in pieces'.⁸

Several women also denounced the king's apostasy. The eccentric prophetess Mrs Amadas, a minor court figure and widow of a keeper of the king's jewels, said in 1534 that 'there shall be a battle of priests, and that the king shall be destroyed, and there shall never [be] more kings in England, and the realm shall be called the land of conquest'. Her opinion of this eventuality is clear from other anti-Henrician statements, notably her insistence that 'the Lady Anne should be burnt' and her exclamation, 'I care not for the king a rush under my foot; it is the king of heaven that rules all.'⁹ Another woman was among the most important early opponents of the regime: Elizabeth Barton, a prophetess and nun of St Sepulchre's, Canterbury, known as the maid of Kent. Chapter 2 will be devoted entirely to Barton's career; for now it is sufficient to show that her anti-government agitation explicitly treated the king's divorce and nascent supremacy as theological error. In one prophecy, for instance, 'an angel appeared and bade the nun go unto the king, that infidel prince of England, and say that I command him to amend his life, and that he leave three things which he loveth and purposeth upon, that is that he take none of the pope's right nor patrimony from him, the second that he destroy all those new folks of opinion and the works of their new learning, the third that if he married and took Anne to wife the vengeance of God should plague him'.¹⁰

Barton's quintessentially spiritual gloss on the royal divorce was most clearly visible in a vision following the king's controversial October 1532 trip to Calais in the company of Anne Boleyn. After the king's return, Barton

⁷ PRO SP 1/95, fol. 76r [LP IX, 74]. Brocke was not alone in this interpretation of the weather. On 30 June 1535, Eustace Chapuys reported to Nicolas de Granvelle that 'many begin already to show discontent, saying that ever since these executions [of Fisher and the Carthusians] it has never ceased raining in England, and that is God's revenge': *CSP Spanish*, vol. 5, p. 506.

⁸ PRO SP 1/94, fols. 22v–23r [LP VIII, 1024].

⁹ BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E. IV, fols. 99r–100r. For Mrs Amadas's relation to Robert Amadas, see Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 59–60.

¹⁰ *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries. Edited from the Originals in the British Museum*, ed. Thomas Wright, Camden Society, 1st series vol. 26 (London, 1843), pp. 14–15.

described a remarkable event which she claimed had occurred when he attempted to receive the Eucharist: 'When the king's highness was at Calais in the interview between his majesty and the French king, and hearing mass in the church of Our Lady at Calais . . . God was so displeased with the king's highness that his grace saw not that time at the mass the blessed sacrament in the form of bread, for it was taken away from the priest (being at mass) by an angel, and ministered to the said Elizabeth then being there present and invisible.'¹¹ Within this vision was a bold and radical statement of the king's illegitimacy. By denying the body of Christ to the king in her vision, Barton symbolically imposed an interdict upon the regime; the blessed sacrament was deemed incompatible with the sacrilegious actions of the Henrician government. More remarkably, the Host was not merely denied to the king but transferred to Barton herself, the embodiment of spiritual purity and, as a nun, a metaphoric stand-in for that other Bride of Christ, the Catholic Church. In an important sense, then, Barton's vision represented the ritual transfer of authority from the monarch to the Church itself. And like all of Barton's revelations, this one was publicised to a remarkable degree through manuscripts, print, pulpit and word of mouth; indeed, the government made it a high priority, in the words of the Imperial ambassador, to 'blot out from people's minds the impression they have that the nun is a saint and a prophet'.¹²

Other evidence that the break with Rome was taken as heretical comes from the Catholic clergy. The parish priest of St Mary Woolchurch in London, for instance, announced that 'all those that preached at the king's commandment were heretics nowadays', and he added that 'if the king do follow such heretics . . . he shall not long continue'.¹³ The popular Catholic preacher William Hubberdyne did not mention the king directly, but during his pulpit dispute with Hugh Latimer at Bristol in 1533 he announced 'that he or they whatsoever he or they be that speak against the pope or any point [of] his acts or ordinances is a heretic'.¹⁴ In 1535, the vicar of Rye told a visitor from overseas that 'this realm was full of heretics and heresies, specially in that any corporal man should be supreme head of the Church'.¹⁵ Sometime before the death of Anne Boleyn, Robert Wynter, parson of South Witham in Lincolnshire, called 'the king and the queen heretics and Lollards' and said he 'wished his knife in their bellies'.¹⁶

Another way to accuse Henry VIII of religious error was to condemn as heretical books published with the king's privilege. For instance, in 1534 John Fraunces, monk of Colchester, was accused of saying: 'There is a book

¹¹ *Statutes*, vol. 3, 25 Hen. VIII. c. 12, p. 448.

¹² *CSP Spanish*, vol. 4, part 2, no. 1154.

¹³ PRO SP 1/94, fols. 1r–2r [*LP* VIII, 1000].

¹⁴ PRO SP 2/O, fol. 31r [*LP* VI, 799].

¹⁵ PRO SP 1/99, fol. 67r [*LP* IX, 846].

¹⁶ PRO STAC 2/33/75.

called the nine articles lately come out in the king's name and his Council's, [and] where they that made it were before schismatics [they] be now plain heretics.¹⁷ The vicar of Newark, Master Lytherlande, preached on Quinquagesima Sunday 1534 that 'no man should suffer his servant or apprentice to have any of these new books against the pope, nor yet any man himself should have them', and he claimed that there were '23 books abroad in this country that the least of them was enough to make an heretic'.¹⁸ Also at Newark, a 'Scottish friar' in 1534 used traditional 'evil counsellors' rhetoric to cloak his condemnation of early Reformation policies: 'Such books as were made *cum privilegio* . . . were heresies, and if the king and his Council and my lord of Canterbury do that which is agreed by parliament and contrary to the holy pope of Rome and the whole Church there, it is heresies. But I dare well say that the king's grace never knew of no such books, and I trust to see that such traitors as have made them that their heads shall have knocks.'¹⁹

It also should not be forgotten that a substantial number of English subjects fled the realm between 1534 and 1536 rather than acquiesce in the royal supremacy. On 30 June 1534, for instance, two observant friars from Newark called Hugh Payne and Thomas Hayfield were apprehended in secular garb while bargaining with a ship's captain to convey them to Brittany.²⁰ A clerk called William Dickinson was 'apprehended by the seaside in Sussex in journey to Rome'.²¹ William Peryn, a Dominican friar who later became prior of St Bartholomew, Smithfield under Queen Mary, left England in self-imposed exile in 1534.²² Friar Arthur of Canterbury gave a sermon at Herne, Kent on Easter 1535 in which he refused to pray for the king as supreme head and told his parishioners that it was sinful to disobey the established Church; by November of the same year he was residing in France.²³ Dr Richard Boorde of Sussex fled England in the same year, having allegedly said that he 'would rather be torn with wild horses than assent or consent to the diminishing of one iota of the bishop of Rome his authority'.²⁴

There is thus copious evidence that among both clergy and commons there was a significant faction of traditionalist opinion that interpreted the royal supremacy in highly radical terms as not merely dubious political or ecclesiological policy, but as theological error.²⁵ The existence of such a powerful strand of opinion should not be a surprise, since surely Thomas More, John Fisher and the Carthusians executed in 1535 would not have developed such extraordinary reputations had their views not been shared

¹⁷ PRO SP 2/P, fol. 152r [LP VII, 454].

¹⁸ PRO E 36/120, fol. 5r.

¹⁹ PRO SP 1/82, fol. 235r [LP VII, 261].

²⁰ PRO SP 1/85, fol. 93r [LP VII, 1020].

²¹ *Original Letters*, vol. 3, series 3, p. 95.

²² See DNB entry for William Peryn.

²³ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁵ Many more cases are noted in Shaw, 'Papal Loyalism in 1530s England', although I sometimes disagree with Shaw's interpretations.

by some sizeable portion of the populace. Yet by delineating this opinion and showing its importance before the beginning of the so-called ‘radical’ or ‘Protestant’ phase of the Henrician Reformation, we are forced to consider a new trajectory for that Reformation as a whole. Rather than beginning with an intrinsically conservative policy that was later hijacked by radicals, we instead see a deeply contested policy that could be interpreted as radical from the start. This implies that revisionist claims about the failure of the English Reformation must be reinterpreted from the beginning of our story; ‘failure’ was a relative term, and to some Catholics the mere acceptance of Henry VIII as supreme head of the Church implied a level of success for heresy that could not be tolerated.

II

To understand the basis of this nonconformist, anti-Henrician Catholicism, we must turn briefly away from the seditious words of disenchanted English subjects and towards the more fully developed arguments of theologians. Most importantly, we must consider the most elaborate statement of the nonconformist Catholic position, Reginald Pole’s *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, composed on the Continent between September 1535 and March 1536 in response to the executions of Fisher and More.²⁶ This text’s uniqueness is owed to the author’s unique circumstances: Pole was already in Italy when he wrote the tract, and in writing it he knowingly sentenced himself to exile. Yet we must not think of the *De Unitate* (as it was known) as any less central or any less authentically English than its great antithesis, Stephen Gardiner’s *De Vera Obedientia*. Both tracts were written by prominent Englishmen as glosses on the same events, and both combined elements of political expediency with heartfelt views on the relationship between Church and state.

Much of Pole’s tract was intended to show, ostensibly in response to Bishop Richard Sampson’s defence of the royal supremacy, that the Roman Church was not an adiabathorous human construction but rather was coterminous in both form and doctrine with Christ’s True Church on earth. Often this was

²⁶ On Pole’s *De Unitate*, see Thomas Mayer, *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 1. My arguments here may seem opposed to Mayer’s interpretations of Pole’s views, especially in his ‘“Heretics be Not in All Things Heretics”: Cardinal Pole, His Circle, and the Potential for Toleration’, in his *Cardinal Pole in European Context: A Via Media in the Reformation* (Aldershot, 2000). Yet, on the contrary, I agree with Mayer that even radical denunciations of Henry VIII were not incompatible with attempts to assert a prophetic voice and draw the errant king back into the fold. I would suggest only that Pole’s belief that ‘heretics be not in all things heretics’, while perhaps in principle leaving room for toleration, in practice amounted to little more than an observation that even a broken clock is right twice a day.

accomplished through the familiar metaphor of the pope as head of the spiritual body of Christ; Pole wrote, for instance, that Fisher and More 'refused to admit that the head should be severed from the body of the Church', preferring to have 'their own heads severed from their bodies'.²⁷ Similarly, Pole argued that the Church of Rome, and by extension the pope himself, may speak for Christ: 'In rejecting the authority of the pontiff and demanding a king instead, you did not reject the pontiff. You rejected Christ.'²⁸ The rationale behind these arguments was one of history and precedent: Christ said, 'I shall never withdraw my spirit from you even to the consummation of the world', and hence those who doubt the validity of the Church 'injure Christ Himself' when they 'ignore the known fact that the spirit of Christ governs the Church' or suggest that 'for centuries the Church has been in ignorance concerning the question of the Church being governed by one or by many'.²⁹ Indeed, Pole marvelled that while 'in civil matters custom alone obtains the force of law after a space of a certain number of years, in the Church Sampson does not even admit the custom of a thousand years'.³⁰ Here Pole turns on its head the argument that governance of the Church is spiritually indifferent, suggesting that the successors of Peter could never have survived so long 'unless Rome, attacked as it so often was by heretics and so frequently plagued by barbarian peoples, had been supported by the Word of Christ'.³¹

Another strand of Pole's argument concerned not the legitimacy of papal authority but the illegitimacy of the king's authority. He noted, for instance, that in the Scriptures there were no Christian kings, and he mocked Sampson's attempts to prove 'on the authority of scriptures... that kings were appointed heads of the Churches, when you could not even show that

²⁷ Reginald Pole, *Pole's Defense of the Unity of the Church*, ed. Joseph E. Dwyer (Westminster, Md., 1965), p. 3; Reginald Pole, *Reginaldi Poli Cardinalis Britannii, ad Henricum Octavum Britanniae Regem, pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione* (Rome, 1536), fol. 2r: 'Pro qua causa tales uiri non dubitarunt, corpora sua ad supplicia offerre, cum capita sibi praecidi maluerunt, quam ei sententiae astipulari, quae a corpore ecclesiae, caput abscinderet'. I have generally used Dwyer's translation in the text, but, since his translation is often more interpretive than literal, I have included the original Latin in the footnotes. When necessary I have changed Dwyer's translation and noted the changes.

²⁸ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 88; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 36r: 'Cum Pontificis auctoritatem reieicistis, & Regem postulastis, non uos Pontificem, sed Christum reieicistis'.

²⁹ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, pp. 139 and 13–14; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 6r: 'Imo Christum ipsum afficias, quae cum spiritu Christi haud dubie docta sit, eam uelis tot seculis ignorasse, utrum ab uno, an a pluribus regetur?'.

³⁰ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 107; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 43v: 'Cumque illic quod in sola consuetudine positum est, uel centum annorum spatio uim legis obtineat, hic ne mille quidem annos admittit'.

³¹ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 139; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 57v: 'Quod certe fieri non potuisset, nisi uerbo Christi Roma toties ab haereticis oppugnata, toties a barbaris gentibus infestata, niteretur'.

kings constituted any part of the body of the Church according to these same scriptures'.³² The Bible, on the contrary, suggested that kings lacked spiritual authority: when Nebuchadnezzar ordered the Israelites to worship a golden idol, 'the best of the children of Israel considered it preferable to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than obey the king in this respect'.³³ But more than arguments from scripture, Pole relied on Church history, asking: 'If the nature of the Church were such that it should be ruled by many heads, these supreme heads being kings, what kind of a Church, I ask you, are you making? Whose spirit would govern this Church if for many centuries it were ignorant of its own nature? ... The Church has been illuminated for many years by a new light from heaven. Are you going to make it shine with your own paltry light?'³⁴

The most extraordinary aspect of the tract, however, was its strong language against the king. Pole stated baldly that Henry VIII had been deserted by the spirit of God, and he launched a blistering assault on the king for his lusts, his hypocrisy in marrying Anne Boleyn, his manipulation of the universities, and his intimidation of advisors.³⁵ More pointedly, he wrote that 'Satan, prince of darkness, presided' at the judgment of Thomas More, and he asked the king: 'For how long do you hope to deceive God without punishment? Can you anticipate anything less than the greatest scourge of the wrath of God? Even now do you place your hope in those lies that fill the books containing a defence of your cause? Do you now place faith in threats of death and torture for those who dare to think the opposite?'³⁶ Finally, Pole denounced the king in absolute terms: 'To everyone you appear more cruel than any pirate, more bold than Satan himself. Truly, then, you were

³² Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 35; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 14r-v: 'Tibi ne credi uis, scripturae autoritate capita ecclesiarum constitutos esse reges, prius quem ex scripturis ostendas, eos partem aliquam corporis ecclesiae fuisse?'

³³ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 21; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 9r: 'qui optimi erant inter filios Israel, in fornacem ardentem coniici, quam ei praecepto Regis obedire'.

³⁴ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 13; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 5v: 'Sed si hic tandem ecclesiae status sit, ut per plura capita regatur, horum autem capitum locum Reges teneant, quam quaeso eam facis, cuius spiritu regi, si tot saeculis statum suum ignorauit? Si nesciuit utrum ne ab uno an a pluribus regi deberet? Si plus homines, cum adhuc in tenebris uersarentur, de statu uniuersi cognouisse facis, quam ecclesiam noua de caelo luce illustratam, post tot secula, de suo?'

³⁵ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, pp. 180-96; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fols. 72r-80v.

³⁶ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 217; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 89r: 'Sathana ... ipse profecto tenebrarum princeps preefuit'. Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 266; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 109r: 'Quousque te Deo impune illusurum esse speras? Quid potes nunc expectare, nisi maximum irae Dei flagellum? An in quibus spem adhuc habuisti, mendaciis, quibus libri causae tuae defensionem continentes sunt referti, & mortis ac cruciatuum minis in eos qui contra sentire audeant, iis etiam nunc fidis?'

such a terrible enemy to the Church that you can be compared with no one except Satan.³⁷

The underlying foundation of these arguments was a view of the Church in which all aspects of Christian history, theology and ecclesiology were wedded together by their common inspiration, the Holy Spirit. The mere idea of a 'Church of England' was in this view a monstrosity, a suggestion that Christ's Church might be beholden to national barriers erected by fallen man. Similarly, the conformist argument that the king would not alter doctrine while acting as supreme head was in this view irrelevant; to claim that the pope was not the successor of Peter, or that Peter was not prince of the apostles, was to challenge the veracity of the Holy Spirit that oversaw the Church.³⁸ Pole's position, like all Spirit-centred views of Christianity, left little room for adiaphora, assuming that the Holy Spirit would imbue all believers with the same truths; where there was disagreement in the Church there was almost certainly error. As such, Pole's theology was in some ways closer to the theology of puritanism than it was to the theology of his erstwhile friend Stephen Gardiner, who was willing to accept Church government as open to a broad range of interpretation.³⁹

The *De Unitate* thus utterly rejected the idea of the break with Rome as compatible with Christ's faith, going so far as to compare Henry VIII to the devil almost a year before he began to use the supremacy for doctrinal experimentation. And, while Reginald Pole may have been far removed from popular politics, we can find similarly radical statements of nonconformist Catholicism in the words of preachers speaking directly to popular audiences. A young priest in Exeter cathedral, for instance, gave a sermon in 1534 in which he stated, cleverly but quite ambiguously, that since St Peter had denied Christ, 'therefore like loving people we deny Peter and take Christ's part'. His superiors, unsure of the spirit in which this comment was made, asked the priest to preach again, and in this second sermon the temptation to express his true feelings was evidently too strong. Preaching on 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul describes 'the parts of the natural body, and how that one member

³⁷ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defence*, pp. 270–1; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 111r: 'Ut multo tu crudelior, quam ullus pirata, audacior, quam ipse Sathanas omnibus uideare; Tum uero ita ecclesiae infectus hostis, ut cum nemine nisi cum Sathana conferri possis'.

³⁸ It is striking how similar this defence of the papal supremacy was to John Fisher's defence of the unity of the Magdalene, with the same explicit references to the Holy Spirit as the author of Church authority and Christian unity. Indeed, Richard Rex has written that: 'Tradition was for Fisher, in effect, the record of the Holy Spirit's activity in leading the Church into all truth': Richard Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 101 and *passim*.

³⁹ On 'Catholic puritanism' and its apocalyptic language in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, see Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge, 1996). I would like to thank Dr Questier for discussing these issues with me.

dependeth on the goodness of the other', the priest 'referred in a likeness the mystical parts of Christ's body unto the parts of the natural body'. He described the clergy as the eyes of this mystical body, temporal rulers as the hands, and commoners as the feet. Finally reaching his crescendo, he told his audience: 'Masters, I fear me that the mystical body of Christ is made a monster. For that is called a monster, after the mind of the philosopher, when there lacketh a part of the natural body or else when there be too many parts, as two heads or three legs of a man, or else when the parts standeth out of order. And so the mystical body of Christ is or may be called a monster . . . because there as the eyes should stand there standeth the hands.'⁴⁰ This was a wholly traditional metaphor, but it presented a view of Christianity in which virtually no aspect of ecclesiology could be considered spiritually indifferent; on this priest's logic, a man might no more alter the shape of the Church than he might alter the shape of his own body.

In 1535, Richard Crowley, curate of Broughton, Oxfordshire, was likewise accused of having 'maintained and upholden the power of the bishop of Rome, and called him pope'. In particular, one of his parishioners informed an assize justice that Crowley had preached that 'the sun is the head of the spirituality, [by] which he meaneth the pope, and the moon signifieth the king, and the stars the people of the world . . . [and] the moon doth take her light of the sun, and now he sayth the light of the sun is taken from us and the world is dark and the people of the world be brought into blindness'. The moon allegory for the king suggested that royal power was a reflection of the power of the Church, while the sun allegory for the pope suggested that Rome was in some sense interchangeable with the 'light of the world', Christ himself. Crowley thus defended the pope's power and passionately declared that 'the bishop of Rochester and the father of Syon with Sir Thomas More and others died for the true faith and holding the true opinion, and so would I myself'.⁴¹

On Easter Sunday 1534, Gabriel Pecock, warden of the Observant Friars at Southampton, preached in St Swithun's church in Winchester, where a man called Robert Cooke was doing penance for sacramentarian heresy. The friar took advantage of the abjured heretic's presence to preach to his audience that they should 'live and die in their faith', telling a remarkable story as an exemplum:

Saint Maurice . . . was a devout and holy man and a great captain under a noble prince, and had under him and at his commandment certain legions of knights . . . Unto him, being among them in armor, was done a message from his prince and sovereign that

⁴⁰ BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E. VI, fol. 205r-v.

⁴¹ PRO SP 1/95, fol. 49r [LP IX, 46]. This sun/moon metaphor was commonplace in papal literature and went back at least to the investiture controversy of the eleventh century.

he should do a certain thing which was against the law, under pain of death. He then considering that if he did his prince's commandment he should grievously displease God, and again on the other side if he did not he should suffer death, and although at that time he was of power and strength, able to have resisted his prince and so to have saved his own life . . . in the sight of all his soldiers [he] did cast his weapon out of his hand . . . exhorting his soldiers likewise to do, and there humbly offered himself to suffer for God's sake.

While ostensibly opposing resistance, the friar thus back-handedly accused the king of commanding his subjects contrary to God's law and urged them to refuse. He then made explicit which government policies he found so reprehensible, claiming that 'diverse hath preached and daily do preach that St Peter had never more power nor authority given unto him by God than any other of the apostles, and that the pope should have no more authority, power, or jurisdiction out of Rome than a bishop hath without of his diocese, nor a bishop no more than a simple priest, and so consequently the pope no more than a simple curate'. Here the friar had collapsed several different arguments together into a single, seamless manifesto, with the former positions coming from royal propaganda and the latter coming from evangelical theology; obviously the friar saw the overthrow of the pope as closely linked to more radical denials of clerical authority. All of these arguments, he preached, were 'grievous errors', and he 'took his book in his hand which lay upon the pulpit by him, and read therein five or six places approving *primatum Petri*, and Englished the same'.⁴²

Perhaps the most extraordinary Romanist sermon from the early years of the royal supremacy was preached at Newark church by 'an observant friar, called Father Arte'. He first told the congregation that:

few did know the very Church of God, and therefore they did greatly err in their faith. But, sayth he, I shall put you out of all doubts, and show you plainly where is the faithful Church of Christ: the Church of Rome is the true and faithful Church of God, and none other. Whosoever is not of this Church is an infidel, and whosoever dieth out of this Church is damned to Hell. Neither is the Church of England the Church of God, nor the Church of France, nor any other Church in the world, but only the Church of Rome.

Arte then challenged the regime's scriptural rationale for the royal supremacy, arguing that, when Christ offered the keys to his kingdom, he was speaking 'only to Peter, and to none other of all the apostles, nor to no other man in the world. And whosoever said the contrary was an heretic, and that he would prove or die for it.' Having thus crossed the Rubicon, Arte launched into a remarkable tirade:

Therefore if the bishop of Canterbury do disobey the pope of Rome or the Church of Rome, as they say he doeth indeed, he is an heretic, a schismatic, and a member of

⁴² PRO SP 2/P, fols. 149r–150r [*LP* VII, 449].

the devil. And whatsoever he be, king or lord, that doeth move you or teach you to disobey the pope of Rome, believe him no more than you would do the devil of hell, for all that so doeth teach you are the very members of the devil. Furthermore do not shrink, but rather suffer death though it be never so cruel, [before] you will receive any such doctrine either of king or lord, for they can but only slay your bodies, and if you follow their commandment and doctrine you shall lose both body and soul. And here he declared unto them the torments and deaths of diverse martyrs, to animate and courage the rude people rather to die than to believe anything that is said or written against the pope of Rome.⁴³

Highly derogatory and decidedly spiritual glosses on the royal supremacy were thus being preached from English pulpits despite the likelihood that these sermons would significantly reduce the preachers' life expectancy. Given the evident vitality of this strain of opinion, we are faced with a discrepancy between standard historiographical views of the 'Henrician schism' and powerful contemporary conceptions of 'Henrician heresy'. The idea of 'schism' comes easily to historians who want to de-emphasise the importance of the Henrician Reformation, as indeed it did to sixteenth-century English Catholics who wanted to downplay the theological significance of their own conformity; hence in Mary's reign Stephen Gardiner and other Catholics were reconciled from their schismatic state rather than being forced to bear faggots, as a way of delineating them from Thomas Cranmer and the evangelicals, who were subjected to formal heresy proceedings. This firm distinction between schism and heresy, however, was something of a fiction, or at least a convenience, rather than an accurate depiction of the religious dynamics of the 1530s. Conformists like Gardiner did not consider themselves in the 1530s to be schismatics at all, but rather thought they were acting in accordance with legally constituted authority on matters that were spiritually indifferent; accepting their own actions as schismatic two decades after the fact was no less politic than their original conformity.

There was also a powerful strain of theological opinion that denied any significant distinction between schism and heresy. While, technically, schism was an ecclesiastical separation and heresy was an error of faith, such a neat division overlooked the centrality of unity in Catholic theology. Not only could the rending of Christ's body easily be seen as heretical in and of itself, but a large body of tradition recognised the difficulty of imagining a schism that was not at heart linked to error. In his writings against the Donatists, for instance, Augustine noted that in practice any schismatic Church inevitably drifted away from the mother Church in points of doctrine, and he thus reduced the distinction between schism and heresy to one merely of degree rather than of kind. In canon law, moreover, the penalties for schism and

⁴³ PRO E 36/120, fols. 5r–6r. This manuscript is undated, but its apparent foggiess over whether the Archbishop of Canterbury had really disobeyed the pope suggests that it comes from 1533 or very soon after.

heresy had long been identical, with schismatics judged to be merely exterior heretics.⁴⁴

On 26 July 1535 this point was applied to the English situation by no less a person than Pope Paul III. While the papal excommunication of Henry VIII would not be promulgated for several more years, the pope wrote an open letter to Francis I of France accusing Henry VIII of 'heresy and schism, and the tearing of his realm from the universal Church' and suggesting that Henry, 'through rebellion, through heresy and schism, and other most enormous crimes, and now lately through the shameful slaughter of a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church . . . has deprived himself of his realm and royal dignity [and] should be declared of us to be thus deprived'.⁴⁵ It is never explained here what doctrinal 'heresy' Henry might have committed. Rather, the point is that the awesome sacrilege of rejecting Rome and beheading a cardinal could not in practice be lacking in fundamental error. The same Holy Spirit that oversaw the Church also directed fallen humanity towards the Truth, and a rejection of the Church thus entailed a loss of grace which inevitably produced a rejection of true faith.

A year later the same point was made more succinctly by Robert Aske, leader of the Pilgrimage of Grace, under interrogation by Thomas Cromwell's agents. Aske was questioned about Bishops Latimer and Cranmer, having allegedly described them as 'heretics and schismatics', and he was asked, 'For what causes ye noted them to be heretics?' and 'For what causes ye noted them to be schismatics?' He responded incisively: 'Aske sayeth [that] well he knoweth not the diversity betwixt a heretic and a schismatic, but he sayeth he can see they varied from the old usages of the Church, and because they preached contrary to the same'.⁴⁶ Here again the difference between the two offences is elided, with schism imagined as merely one stage in the life cycle of heresy.

These ideas were most fully elaborated in Pole's *De Unitate*. Pole, citing St Cyprian, argued that 'heresies do not arise nor are schisms born in any other way than through lack of submission to the priest of God'.⁴⁷ The point here was not to distinguish between schism and heresy but rather to equate

⁴⁴ Much of this paragraph summarises arguments and evidence in Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England*, pp. 69–70. In Mary's reign there remained a radical strand of Catholic opinion that rejected the regime's politic acceptance of former collaborators. John Standish, for instance, quoted Origen to prove that 'where be schisms there be heresies, there be dissensions, and finally utter destruction': John Standish, *The Triall of the Supremacy* (London, 1556), sig. r5v.

⁴⁵ Stephen Gardiner, *Obedience in Church and State: Three Political Tracts by Stephen Gardiner*, ed. Pierre Janelle (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 14–17.

⁴⁶ 'The Pilgrimage of Grace and Aske's Examination', ed. Mary Bateson, *EHR*, 5 (1890), pp. 330–48 and 550–78, quotations at pp. 552 and 567.

⁴⁷ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 151, quoting St Cyprian's twelfth letter to St Cornelius; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 62r: 'Nec enim, inquit, aliunde haereses obortae sunt, aut nata sunt schismata, quam inde, quod sacerdoti Dei non obtemperatur'.

them: they are siblings, both born from the sins of pride and rebellion. Again citing St Cyprian, Pole argued that the Roman Church is the ‘chair of Peter’ and that ‘this opinion has come down to us from that time to the present – about twelve hundred years. What doubt can there be about affirming that this was always the opinion of the Catholic Church? What doubt that all who dissent from this opinion are schismatics and heretics?’⁴⁸ Pole was even more precise in his condemnation of the rift between the king and the Holy Spirit, writing: ‘What a great amount of pestilential sedition threatens us when you call into doubt whom one shall obey, whom one can trust, whose words one shall listen to! You snatch away knowledge of the cause of the Church of God, of the Church that is governed by the Holy Spirit, of the Church that cannot deceive or be deceived.’⁴⁹ Henry VIII was portrayed as leading his subjects out of the faith, with deadly consequences for their souls. As Pole put it:

No injury against the spouse of Christ can be slight. Everything done against the Church must be serious. The deed you perpetrated, however, so excels that it manifestly declares that you had in mind the overthrow of the foundations of the Church itself. For what else were you doing when you attempted to take away from the Church the Spirit of God, the pledge of love for the spouse, the pledge of life and eternal duration? What else but this were you attempting when you now called into doubt, after such a long period of time, so many of the decrees of the Church that had been established by the authority of the Spirit of God?⁵⁰

III

Opposed to these Catholic nonconformist views, with all their nuance and variation, there was also a variety of conformist arguments available which

⁴⁸ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 154. I have changed this quotation to ‘twelve hundred years’ from ‘fifteen hundred years’, which is *sic* in Dwyer’s translation for ‘annis mille & ducentis’. See Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 63v: ‘Romanam ecclesiam cathedram Petri esse, in petro fuisse fundatam ecclesiam; qui possumus aliter existimare, quam semper fuisse hanc sententiam ecclesiarum iam inde ab ipsis Apostolorum temporibus, cum ille pene aequa lis eorum temporum idem dicat? Quae sententia cum ab hinc annis mille & ducentis ad no peruenerit, quid est quod dubitemus affirmare hanc semper catholicae ecclesiae sententiam fuisse; & qui ab hac dissentiant, schismaticos omnes & haereticos esse?’

⁴⁹ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, pp. 199–200. Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 81v: ‘Quanta hinc pestiferae seditionis moles nobis impendit, quod indubium reuocas, cui quis obediat, cui credat, cuius verba audiat? Quod ecclesiae Dei, quae spiritu sancto regitur, quae nec falli potest, nec fallere, causae cognitionem eripis’.

⁵⁰ Dwyer (ed.), *Pole's Defense*, p. 268; Pole, *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione*, fol. 110r: ‘At quanta tandem haec in ecclesiam iniuria fuit? Nulla quidem in Christi sponsam tenuis esse potest. Quaecunque inferant, maximae sint oportet. Sed tamen haec abs te illata ita excellit, ut liquido declaret, in animo te habere ipsam funditus euertere. Nam quid aliud facis, cum spiritum Dei, pignus amoris in sponsam, pignus vitae, & sempiternae durationis, asuferre ab ea conaris? Quid enim? Nonne hoc conaris, cum tot ab illa, spiritu Dei auctore, constituta ac decreta, tot longissima & nunquam interrupta consuetudine confirmata, nunc denique tanto interuallo in dubium revocas?’

supported the royal supremacy and allowed Catholics to remain steadfastly loyal to Henry VIII.⁵¹ For instance, a letter written by 'Father Fewterer, general confessor of the monastery of Syon' to the brethren of the Charterhouse of London began its defence of the king with an argument from Scripture: having much studied 'what the law of God will' for the authority of the bishop of Rome and the authority of the king, he discovered 'both in Old and New Testament great truths for our prince, and for the bishop of Rome nothing at all'. Particular scriptural precedents cited in the king's behalf were by now familiar to anyone involved in the debate over papal authority: Saul's power as 'head of the people and Church of God' was seen as a model for royal jurisdiction over the Church, while Paul's exhortation to 'all the Church to be obedient to his grace' was extended even to matters of faith. As Lucy Wooding has rightly noted, these appeals to scripture over and above the traditions of the Church represented an important strand of Catholic humanism that was available for appropriation by the king's Catholic allies.⁵²

Yet we should be wary of asserting too strong a connection between humanism and support for the king; nonconformists like Reginald Pole and Thomas More were, of course, also humanists, while conformists could include alongside their humanism other arguments that were far more scholastic. Fewterer, for instance, followed his scriptural exegesis with a legal argument to prove that jurisdiction over cases in the church courts (like Henry VIII's divorce case) was adiaphorous and thus open to royal control. To make this argument, he posited that 'doctors do grant that the bishop of Rome may dispense and license a layman to be judge in a spiritual cause'. Given that such a dispensation was possible, he argued, it cannot be forbidden by God's law: there was neither scripture nor tradition that expressly forbade a layman from exercising authority over clerics, or else such a thing could never be licensed by Rome. But, the argument continued, if lay authority over the clergy was thus neither expressly ordered nor expressly forbidden in divine law, then it must be adiaphorous, and hence it might legitimately be enacted by the prince within the boundaries of his realm.⁵³ This was an extremely clever argument from canon law, but it assumed the authority of tradition

⁵¹ Despite recent claims to the contrary (see Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism*, pp. 72–3) there were also evangelical arguments available to support the royal supremacy, many of which interpreted it in heavily spiritual and even apocalyptic terms. I have considered some of these arguments in my 'Clement Armstrong and the Godly Commonwealth: Radical Religion in Early Tudor England', in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism, 1490–1558* (forthcoming).

⁵² Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism*, chs. 2–3.

⁵³ BL Harleian MS 604, fols. 78r–80v. Since the surviving manuscript is a fair copy, and given its obvious propaganda value, it seems likely that this tract was intended for public consumption.

and the 'doctors' of the Church in ways that were largely antithetical to humanist formulations.

Another conformist Catholic was Simon Matthew, a prebendary of St Paul's who might serve as a model for the ideal of a Henrician *via media*. Matthew published a sermon in 1535 in which he explicitly attacked the primacy of St Peter, condemned the treason of Thomas More and John Fisher, and supported the succession of the infant princess Elizabeth. Most importantly, however, Matthew defended the Church of England against charges of schism and heresy, insisting that the unity of the Church consists not in allegiance to a single authority but rather in 'the knowledge of Christ and true belief in him'. In particular, the royal supremacy over the Church of England had no effect on the unity of the Church, since it was one of Christ's great miracles that 'the diversity of regions and countries maketh not the diversity of Churches, but the unity of faith maketh all regions one Church, although the same regions were unknown to us and us to them'. In Matthew's view, then, the real threat to the Church came from people on both sides of the nascent religious divide who interpreted the royal supremacy too broadly. On one side, More and Fisher were foolish to oppose their king over mere questions of jurisdiction; on the other side, Matthew attacked over-zealous 'defenders of the king's matter' who 'rage and rail . . . calling the bishop of Rome the harlot of Babylon or the beast of Rome' and were thus more fit 'to preach at Paul's Wharf than at Paul's Cross'.⁵⁴

The Bishop of Lincoln, John Longland, supported the elimination of papal authority for altogether different reasons. For Longland, the key ecclesiological event of the 1530s was not the royal supremacy per se but rather the declaration that the Bishop of Rome had no more authority outside his diocese than any other bishop. The logical corollary of this position was not only that popes could not challenge the legal jurisdiction of monarchs, but also that popes could not challenge the spiritual jurisdiction of other bishops. Longland expanded this idea into an ecclesiology in which bishops were the ultimate spiritual authorities within their dioceses, just as kings were the ultimate secular authorities within their kingdoms. Thus rather than caesaropapism, Longland read into the royal supremacy a strict separation of Church and state, with bishops sovereign over all ecclesiastical affairs within their dioceses. Supremacy for the king implied only a figurehead position as father and first-Christian of the realm; spiritual power was held by

⁵⁴ Symon Matthewe, *A Sermon Made in the Cathedrall Church of Saynt Paule at London, the XXVII. Day of June, Anno. 1535. by Symon Matthewe* (London, 1535), sigs. A7v–A8v, C7v–C8r, A5v, B6r, A7v, C7v–D1v. This sermon is discussed in Peter Marshall, 'Is the Pope a Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism', in Ethan Shagan and Margaret Sena (eds.), *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics in Early Modern England* (forthcoming).

the bishops, and Longland later opposed (though not always successfully) all attempts by the Crown, vicegerent or metropolitan to usurp that power within Lincoln.⁵⁵

The quintessential conformist Catholic gloss on the royal supremacy, however, was Stephen Gardiner's *De Vera Obedientia*, one of the most influential tracts of the early Reformation and the great albatross that would hang around the necks of Gardiner and the Henrician conformists during the reign of Mary. For Gardiner, the allegiance of the Church to Rome was an historical accident rather than an expression of God's will, and he voiced his opposition to papal supremacy succinctly: 'This I utterly deny, that God ordained the bishop of Rome to be the chief as touching any absolute worldly power.' In particular, he expanded Pauline doctrines of Christ's covenant as a law of the spirit rather than of the flesh, arguing that the prerogatives given to Peter by Christ were 'not given unto flesh and blood, but to be a testimony of that excellent profession of his faith'. He admitted that in past times the Church of Rome had possessed great holiness and power, but he denied that this was grounds for worldly obedience; such power was *iure humano* rather than ordained by God. He concluded that all obedience within a given realm was rightfully due to the sovereign of that realm, and that the king of a Christian people might therefore be seen as head of the Church within his kingdom. Gardiner's interpretation of the 'Church' within a kingdom, however, was extremely narrow: 'The Church of England is nothing else but the congregation of men and women, of the clergy and the laity, united in Christ's profession. That is to say, it is justly to be called the Church because it is a communion of Christian people, and of the place it is to be named the Church of England.' Such a Church had no right to different doctrine than the rest of the universal Church, so the head of it had no prerogative to pronounce such doctrine; indeed, Gardiner's logic assumed that Christian doctrine is everywhere uniform and unambiguous. He imagined a world in which kings used the power of the sword to defend their realms against error; no king answers to a higher earthly authority, but all answer directly to Christ. In one sense this logic was quite radical in blurring the distinction between secular and ecclesiastical authority, but in another sense its truncated reading of Henry VIII's spiritual authority provided almost the ontological apex of conservatism. The king was given jurisdiction over the clergy within his realm, but otherwise the *status quo ante* remained unchanged. The 'Church of England' was merely the Church *in* England, and its head was merely the leader of the people who constituted that Church.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ This paragraph summarises the argument in Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln Under John Longland 1521–1547* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 65–88.

⁵⁶ Janelle (ed.), *Obedience in Church and State*, pp. 154–5, 126–7, 102–5 and 94–5.

Besides the carefully formulated responses of clerics, there is no doubt that many among the non-elite laity also supported the royal supremacy. Gardiner reported in 1535, for instance, that 'all sorts of people are agreed upon this point with most steadfast consent, learned and unlearned, both men and women: that no manner of person born and brought up in England hath ought to do with Rome'. John Tregonwell concurred in 1536, finding 'as much conformity among men, and as ready to obey the king's authority, injunctions, and other orders declared to them, as ever I saw any men obey the same'.⁵⁷ The grounds for this conformity, of course, are extremely difficult to discover; obedience to the law leaves few records. In some cases, however, we can get a sense of the variety of motivations behind support for the royal supremacy, and from these we can at least make some inferences about the structure of popular conformity.

To begin with, there clearly were reasons having nothing to do with ideology why subjects would have had an interest in supporting the royal supremacy. We must not underestimate the importance of fear; it took a particular kind of person to risk death for conscience' sake. Thus reluctant or passive conformity was an attractive option, and its contours occasionally became visible when someone whispered just a little too loudly that he or she was only going through the motions. John Pomfrey, for instance, told acquaintances at a Southwark alehouse in 1534 that they should 'take patience for a time', in other words conform to royal authority, since 'the day shall come that he that was called pope sometime shall be pope again'.⁵⁸ Pomfrey was evidently the one who should have been more patient, since his words were reported to the government. Sometimes these attitudes became apparent when otherwise-loyal subjects drank too much ale and inadvertently said or did things they later regretted. In February 1535, for instance, a Suffolk 'spinster' called Margaret Chanseler was brought before Sir Robert Drury for having said, among other things, that 'the queen's grace had one child by our said sovereign lord the king which she said was dead born, and she prayed God that he might never have another'. When Chanseler confessed to these words, her excuse was that 'she was drunken when she did speak them, and that the evil spirit did cause her to speak them, and she was very penitent for her offenses'.⁵⁹ Similarly, in Coventry in November 1535 a tailor and three yeomen became sickeningly drunk and then relieved themselves at the town cross in the marketplace; unfortunately for them, in their drunkenness they thought it would be amusing to 'pluck down part of diverse acts of parliament and other [of] the king's proclamations being

⁵⁷ Robert Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (New York, 1998), p. 13.

⁵⁸ PRO E 36/120, fol. 36r [LP VII, 1488]. ⁵⁹ PRO SP 1/89, fol. 158r [LP VIII, 196].